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REMARKS OF J. H. BENTON, JR.
PRESIDENT OF THE VERMONT
ASSOCIATION OF BOSTON • AT ITS
ANNUAL BANQUET • THURSDAY
JANUARY 12, 1905

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*Remarks of J. H. Benton, Jr., President of The
Vermont Association of Boston, at its Annual
Banquet, Thursday, January 12, 1905.*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
Invited Guests, and Brethren of the
Association,— I welcome you all to this
Annual Dinner of the Vermont Association of
the City of Boston.

We began in 1887 with sixty-seven members, and at our first banquet we had an attendance of fifty-six persons. We now have six hundred and fifty-two members, and constant accessions to our membership. We have had an annual dinner every year since our organization, and we were the pioneers in opening rooms for the daily use of a State Association. Our example was eagerly followed by the Sons of New Hampshire, and is now being followed by the Sons of the Pine Tree State, who propose to move into the abandoned nest of the Twentieth Century Club. It is to be hoped they will not adopt all the ideas of the Twentieth Century Club. (Laughter.)

The tie of birth in a particular place has been said to be one that will not alone hold an Association together, because different kinds of people are born in the same State. But the reason that the tie of being born in Vermont holds an

Association together is perfectly obvious. It is because nobody is ever born in Vermont, of the lineage of the Fathers of Vermont, who is not a proper person to be loved and liked and associated with by everybody else. (Laughter and applause.)

Now, we come here year after year as Vermonsters, as Vermonters living in Massachusetts, as Vermonters who live in the Federal Union, and every year at this gathering we put side by side the flag of our native State and the flag of our adopted State, and on either side of these we place the gorgeous ensign of the Republic. (Applause.) But we come here primarily because we are Vermonters, to pledge ourselves to the ideas for which Vermont stands and always has stood.

In these days when college professors are teaching that the Revolution which freed the Colonies from the tyranny of England was on the whole a mistake, when so-called "cultivated" people are speaking of patriotism as a "narrow virtue," and of the flag as a mere "piece of textile fabric," a piece of "painted bunting," it is a good thing for the Sons of Vermont to come together and kindle anew their devotion to those principles of liberty and loyalty for which Vermont has always stood fast and foremost. (Applause.)

The early settlers of Vermont were poor in

money, but rich in courage and in strength. They were strong, sturdy, earnest men and women. They were sufficient unto themselves, and by severe and constant toil they took from the soil on which they settled nearly all that was necessary for a plain, simple, healthful life. They had clay for bricks and lime for mortar, and the woods gave them logs and lumber, from which they made their rude but comfortable dwellings and furniture. From the sap of the maple they made delicious sugar, and the hemlock gave the bark with which to tan the hides of their cattle into excellent leather. From the flax they made durable linen for household use and for summer clothing, and from the wool of their sheep warm blankets and excellent "frocking" and other clothing for wear in winter. The lye leached from the ashes of the clearings made "potash" and "pearl-ash," not only for their own necessities, but for sale in the distant markets of Portland and Boston, where they obtained salt, almost the only necessity of life which Vermont does not produce. Wheat, rye, oats, barley, Indian corn, and nearly all the other cereals of the temperate zone grew on the hillsides and in the valleys, while the blackberry, raspberry, blueberry, strawberry, and other healthful and delicious fruits grew wild in the woods and glades. They raised apples, currants, cherries, plums, pears, and other cultivated fruits. Coffee beans

made a fair substitute for imported coffee, and they even had from the leaves of various shrubs a substitute for tea. Tobacco, less fragrant but equally as wholesome as that from beyond the sea, was raised in the south, and with care in sheltered places in the north.

The lakes, rivers, and brooks were filled with bass, pickerel, muskalonge, trout, and other fish, while in the woods bear, deer, raccoon, partridge, and other game were found in abundance. They trapped the otter and the beaver in the streams, and the fox on the hillside. They had geese, turkeys, fowls, and pigeons, while the horses, sheep, and cattle which grazed in their pastures and fed on the hay from their meadows were not excelled elsewhere. They built their own carding and fulling mills and looms, and their own tanneries. The women spun the yarn, wove the cloth, and made the sheets, blankets, and garments, and the soap for washing, and the candles for light in their own homes. The men tanned the leather, and once a year the travelling shoemaker set up his bench in the great kitchen with its capacious fireplace, and made the boots and shoes for the family. They had cider from the apple, and wine from the rhubarb, the elderberry, and the wild grape. They needed no butcher or baker, for they baked in their brick ovens and had their beef, mutton, and pork from their own flocks and herds and yards.

They put school-houses and meeting-houses on the hillsides, and the teachers taught for small pay and “boarded around” by the scholar, while the ministers were paid mainly in the produce of the farms. They had none of the appliances of modern husbandry. The mowing-machine, the horse-rake, the reaper, the threshing-machine, the improved plough, and the cultivator were unknown. The axe and the crowbar, the beetle and the wedge, the sickle and the scythe, the shovel and the hoe, the flail and the fan, were the simple implements with which they subdued the wilderness, cultivated the soil, and gathered its harvest. They had no eight-hour day, but labored “from sun to sun.” With the exception of the Fourth of July, when they assembled to hear the Declaration of Independence read, and usually to hear an “oration” by the minister, and Thanksgiving, when they worshipped, and fed on the good things they raised, they had no holidays; labor was so constant and unremitting that it became a habit of their lives, and their descendants even now, under better conditions, often feel that a leisure hour is an offence. They were orderly, industrious, frugal, God-fearing, and independent people. They owned the land they tilled, and were the most perfect democracy in America. They sought freedom in the fertile valleys and verdant mountains, and when they were threatened by the armies of England on the north,

menaced by the hostility of New York on the west, tormented by the claims of Massachusetts and New Hampshire on the south and east, and refused even recognition by the Continental Congress, they not only protected their homes with their trusty rifles, but they founded the first complete constitutional government on the continent. Their long struggle for the protection of their homes stimulated and strengthened their native love for personal liberty, and the dominant trait in the character of their descendants has been intolerance of oppression and intense devotion to personal freedom.

There is an incident in the life of a Vermont magistrate which I think exemplifies this trait of Vermont character so well that I venture to relate it to you. Theophilus Harrington, whose name I dare say is unfamiliar to most of you, was a judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature of Vermont from 1783 to his death in 1813. There once appeared before him a man claiming to be the owner of a fugitive slave, a black boy who had escaped from bondage, and whom the claimant asked to have returned under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. Harrington said to him: "Well, put in your title." The claimant then produced and proved the execution of a bill of sale of the boy from a person who had formerly held him as a slave to the claimant, and proved by affidavits the identity of the boy with

the one named in the bill of sale. The judge then said: "Is that all?" The claimant replied that would seem to be enough, but finally produced and put in evidence a bill of sale of the mother of the boy from a man who had held her as a slave to the man who made the bill of sale of the boy to the claimant. "Is that all?" said Judge Harrington. "Why, yes," said the claimant, "I have gone back to the ownership of the mother." "Yes," said the judge, "but you have not gone back to the original proprietor. A bill of sale from God Almighty is necessary to make title to a man in Vermont. The prisoner is discharged." And so the black boy went free. (Great applause.)

It was of this decision that Senator Sumner, speaking in the United States Senate more than half a century after, said in that sonorous English which he loved so well: "I know something of the jurisprudence of our country, but I know of nothing in the wisdom of Marshall, the learning of Story, or the fulness of Kent which will ripen with time like this honest decree." Mr. Sumner was right. That decree has ripened with time because it was based upon the primary proposition upon which all sound government rests, that every man owns himself. The people of Vermont did not forget this honest and fearless magistrate, for in 1884 the legislature made an appropriation for the erection of a monument

to his memory. The monument was erected and dedicated by fitting ceremonies, among which was an address by the Hon. Hoyt H. Wheeler, the present United States District Judge for the District of Vermont, on July 3, 1886, and it now stands in the pleasant town of Clarendon, to tell the story of this brave judge of old.

The principle upon which Judge Harrington rested his decision is the primary principle of Vermont law, and the governing rule of Vermont life. It represents what, to coin a word, may well be called "Vermontism"—devotion to personal liberty, absolute intolerance of anything which interferes with the right of each human being to himself. This was the spirit in which the State of Vermont was founded. It was the spirit which prevailed in the building of the State by the Allens, the Warners, the Chittendens, the Slades, and the long line of patriotic men who founded and built up this republican commonwealth. Every law, every custom, every act of the men of Vermont, show their devotion to personal liberty. They inscribe on their State flag—"Unity and Freedom." In their constitution they call themselves, "Freemen of Vermont." Their town meetings have always been known as "Freemen's meetings," and their representatives in the legislature are by the constitution termed "Representatives of the Free-

men of Vermont." No sane person has ever been deprived of personal liberty in the State of Vermont except upon due conviction of crime. No slave was ever returned to bondage from the State of Vermont. When the federal government, controlled by the representatives of the slave-holding States, enacted the infamous Fugitive Slave Law of 1852, Vermont promptly met this abominable statute by acts securing to persons claimed as fugitive slaves the right of the writ of habeas corpus and a jury trial, and making it the duty of the State attorneys in the different counties diligently and faithfully to use all lawful means to protect, defend, and procure the discharge of every person claimed as a fugitive slave under the Fugitive Slave Act. (Applause.)

When the slave-holding States attempted to break up the Union by force of arms in 1861, the love of liberty of the people of Vermont prompted them to the most heroic exertions in behalf of the Union. The story of their deeds is familiar to you all. Indeed, many of us had a part in what was done. It is good for us not only to remember it, but to talk about it.

The State had no military organization and had arms hardly sufficient to equip a single regiment, but its Governor was the first to issue a call for a special session of the legislature to aid the federal government, and to raise a regiment of troops for immediate service.

On April 25, 1861, the legislature met at Montpelier, and within twenty-four hours by unanimous votes of both House and Senate it appropriated one million dollars for war purposes, and also provided for raising six regiments for two years' service, being the State's share of an army of 600,000 men, in addition to the one regiment called for by the President for three months' service. It then voted to pay seven dollars a month to each private soldier in addition to the thirteen dollars paid by the general government, provided that the necessities of the families of all soldiers should be relieved at the expense of the State, laid a war tax of ten cents on the dollar of the grand list, and within forty-two hours after it met it adjourned, having done more for the Union in that brief time than any other State in proportion to its population and resources.

And the freemen of Vermont never halted or faltered in the great work of saving the national Union. With a total population in 1861 of only 315,009 men, women, and children, and but 60,719 men subject to military duty, Vermont sent to the Union Army and Navy 35,242 men, or more than eleven per cent of her entire population. More than one-half of the able-bodied men capable of bearing arms in Vermont volunteered and served in the defence of the Union. With a total tax valuation of all the real and

personal property of all her people, a little over \$85,000,000, she expended nearly \$10,000,000 for war purposes. (Applause.) More than 5,000 of her soldiers were killed in battle, or died in service of wounds and disease ; more than 5,000 more were discharged from the service for wounds or disability received in it, making nearly one-third of the whole number.

It should also be remembered that these troops were not from the ranks of the vagrant and the vicious, or from the surplus and idle population of crowded cities. They were the flower of the young men of the State, nurtured in Christian homes, taught in Christian schools. They came from the farms, the shops, and the professions, and from every walk of industrious and honest life. Each was dear to some family circle, where loved ones silently suffered when he fell, and where in many a woman's heart there still rests the shadow of an unending sorrow.

The number of Vermont soldiers killed in battle exceeded the ratio killed in the whole army by twenty-five in every thousand ; and taking into account the sons of Vermont killed in action, who served in regiments from other States, more men of Vermont fell in battle for the Union than from any Northern State, in proportion to its population. Its troops fought in the first battle of the war and in the last battle, and in over one

hundred and fifty reported engagements. About one-third of the soldiers from Vermont served in what was known as the "Vermont Brigade," the only brigade in the army that was known by a distinctive name. It was a part of the famous Sixth Corps, and was distinguished as the "fighting brigade of the fighting corps." This brigade was engaged in thirty-seven officially reported battles and engagements, or an average of nearly three a month, and it marched over two thousand miles in Maryland and Virginia. Its proportion of men killed in action and fatally wounded was nearly three times as great as the average in the entire Union Army. It carried the colors of Vermont in the front of many of the bloodiest battles of the war, and brought them all back untarnished and untouched save by the shot and shell and the smoke and blood of battle. (Great applause.)

And when, on the third day of the battle of Gettysburg, Lee, after concentrating upon the centre of the Union line the fire of one hundred and fifty guns for two hours, hurled against it the flower of his army, under General Pickett, in the most determined assault of the war, it was the 13th and 16th Regiments of the Second Vermont Brigade commanded by Stannard, which wheeled from the line and moving at double quick struck the advancing rebel column in the flank, and broke the charge that would otherwise

probably have pierced the Union line. It is no wonder that when General Doubleday saw this daring move of General Stannard, and realized what its result would be he shouted, "Glory to God! glory to God! See the Vermonters go it." The scene has been often painted in words to which nothing can be added by me, and it will live in story and in song as long as American history endures. (Applause.)

Time does not permit the tithe of this wondrous story to be told, and yet it would be incomplete without a reference to the men of Vermont who served in the troops of other States. Some idea of how many there were, and of how well they served, is given by the fact that a very incomplete list of Vermont men holding commissions in the troops of other States comprises the names of six full major-generals, fifteen brigadier-generals, twenty-five colonels, thirteen lieutenant-colonels, forty-five majors, and two hundred and six captains and lieutenants. (Applause.)

What Vermonter's heart does not throb with pride at these recollections? We love the soil of our native State—this Sparta of America. From its mountains robed in green and its hilltops crowned with the clustering maples to its valleys clad in verdure; from the beautiful Connecticut winding amid broad and fertile meadows to the romantic Winooski and Missisquoi flowing to the shining Champlain, it is all dear to us.

But more than this we cherish its history and its memories ; the story of its early trials and of its later success, of the lives of its sturdy men and its noble women, of their devotion to freedom and to personal liberty, of their constancy and their courage, and the sacred memories that cluster about the homes of our childhood, — these are our choicest heritage. (Prolonged applause.)



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